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Socio-Economic Conditions of Farmers' of Bagalkot District and their Impact on Suicides

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Abstract

The latest spate of suicides among farmers in India today is a manifestation of an underlying crisis in agriculture which is a result of the marginalization of agrarian economy in national policy since the economic reforms of the 90s. It has been pointed that "Agriculture is the mainstay of the Indian economy, agriculture and allied sectors contribute nearly 17.8 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Indian, while about 65 to 70 percent of the population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood". The existing literature on the agricultural crisis provided several factors that are directly and indirectly responsible for the distress and disappointment among farmers. Unfortunately due to uncertainty of monsoon, non-availability of credit, increasing prices of seeds, pesticides and fertilizers, agriculture has become a most critical industry and farmers are suffering due to economic distress and they are committing suicide on large scale in different provinces of the country. While Indebtedness of the farmers seems to be the major reported cause, the reasons that prompt the farmers to borrow money from individuals rather than from institutions are varied and differ from place to place. So an in depth studies on the farmers' distress leading to suicides in Bagalkot District is need of our study, concern in the present study facing major problems in farming community.

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Key Words: Socio-economic, Suicide, Distress, Farmer, Factor, Agricultural

Introduction

Agriculture, being a means of livelihood of almost two third of the population in the country represents India's most important economic sector. It provides livelihood to about 70 percent of the population employs about 65 percent of the work-force, contributes about 24 percent to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and nearly 16 percent to export earnings (1). Rain fed agro-ecosystem has a distinct place in Indian Agriculture, occupying 67 percent of the cultivated area, contributing 44 percent of the food grains and supporting 40 percent of the human and 65 percent of the livestock population (2). The farming systems in rain fed areas are quite diverse with a variety of crops and cropping systems, agro-forestry and livestock production. Rearing of sheep and goats plays an important role in the economy of India in general and sustainable livelihood of poor people of rain fed agro-ecosystem in particular. This is accounted by inherent risk involved in the crop farming due to uncertainty of rainfall and occurrence of recurrent droughts (3 and 4). The extensive drought spotlights a situation of mass rural deprivation and a mindset that is insensitive to it. According to the Ministry of Finance of the Government of India GDP from agriculture, forestry and fishing for the year 2008-09 was 16 percent. Despite a steady decline of its share in GDP, agriculture is still the largest economic sector and plays a significant role in the overall socio-economic development of our country. It is the main source food to the growing population. Our country could achieve the self sufficiency of food grains in few decades of its

political emancipation. The food production in India reached to 213 million tonnes in 2001-02. It was increased to 231 million tonnes in 2007-08 and there was a decrease of the same by one million tonnes (230 million tonnes) in 2008-09 due to drought in some states, flood in some other states, and also due to agricultural crises in the country as a whole.

The issue of suicidal deaths is under researched in India. However, in last few years, the issue of suicidal deaths has been receiving renewed social and policy attention. While suicides of students, farmers, professional and married make news headlines, a significant proportion of suicidal deaths remain unreported. In the recent years, many cases of farmer's suicide have been reported in a number of states, particularly Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab and Maharashtra (5). Therefore, most of the studies in Indian context revolve around farmers' suicide. For instance, Iyer and Manick (6) try to identify the socio economic profile of the suicide victims. Study also examined the economic and social factors of suicides using data from the three highly suicide prone blocks of Sangrur district namely Lehragaga, Andana and Barnala and suggested for the preventive measures in the suicide prone blocks and general measures to prevent further recurrence of suicide. Documents that in the state of Maharashtra, the suicide mortality rate for farmers has increased from 15 in 1995 to 57 in 2004 (5); whereas, for the state of Punjab, Satish (7) examine possible linkage between institutional credit, indebtedness and farmers' suicides. Both the

studies find that indebtedness is one of the major cause of suicide among farmers but warns that it cannot be taken as the sole cause as the data showed no direct causal relationship between institutional credit, indebtedness and suicides (7).

Karnataka is the eighth largest states of India having severe agrarian distress since many years. But it had no history of farmers committing suicide when crops or market failed, although there were agitations of farmers in the past (8). The first incidence of farmers' suicide which attracted considerable attention of media and public was reported on 12th December 1997 Mr. Shivaraj Mainalle of Siddeshwar village in Bidar District committed suicide. The studies on farmer's suicide for the first time in Karnataka were undertaken by Shetty and Vasavi (9 and 10). Out of the last nine years, the state has experienced drought for seven years, this is one of the major reasons for farmers taking extreme step of suicide. A large number of farmers committed suicide during the drought period from 2000-01 to 2003 -04. The sources of the Government of India point out that there are 9642 suicidal deaths of farmers between 2000-2001 to 2008-2009 in Karnataka State. The total number of suicidal deaths of

farmers in Karnataka reported for the three years period from is 969 (2007-08 to 2009-10, June).

Objectives of the Study

The present study was undertaken with the objective of the studies the social and economical status of the (farmers suicides) victims' families.

Materials and Methods

This study depends mainly on primary data. 65 samples (2003-2004 to 2009-2010) were collected from farmers' suicides in Bagalkot district. Structured questionnaires were used to get information from the respondents. The data collected from all the taluks of Bagalkot District regarding the farmers' suicide were analyzed and interpreted by using the statistical tools.

Results and Discussion

Table1 Age wise distribution of farm Victim and Educational Status of Victims'

Age	Suicide Case (N)	Educational Status	Suicide Case (N)
below18	0	Illiterate	33(50.76)
18-27	6 (9.24)	below primary	18(28.57)
28-37	6(9.24)	Primary	10(15.87)
38-47	20(30.75)	Matriculate	03(4.76)
48-57	27(41.53)	College Education	01(1.59)
58yrs+abv	6(9.24)		
Total	65	Total	65

Age wise distribution of farm victims is given in table 1. More number of suicides has been reported in the age group of 48-57. This age group is more vulnerable as there is accumulated stress due to multiple problems relating to the income of family. Education and marriage of the children, relationship maintained with other relatives etc are all the contributing factors. As a result of in creasing tress as the head

of the family the individuals is in confusion, chaos conflict and all other problem force the person towards suicide. Education plays an important role in moulding personality of an individual. Of the 65 farm victims in Bagalkot District 33 victims are illiterates. Inference could be drawn from table 1 that the numbers of suicides are less with the educated farmers.

Table 2 Social and Intra -Family Reasons for Distress given by Victims' Family

Causes for Suicide	Cases Reported (%)
Inter family problems	10 (15.38)
Marriage of daughter/sister	16 (24.61)
Stress in married life /stress by money lender	19 (29.23)
Financial commitments of the family	20 (30.76)
Total	100

Social and Intra family Reasons for distress which led to suicides have been given in table 2. Of the causes listed for farm suicides the available records and the details members of the victim's family point out that in 30.76 percent cases failure to meet the financial commitment of the family is the main

cause for suicides. This is followed by the psychological stress 29.23 percent of farmers have committed suicide due to stress in married life/ stress by money lenders. Sociological and Psychological counseling may help in resolving the individual level problems along with other confidence building measures.

Table 3 Annual Income of the Victims Families
(Rs in thousands)

Size-class of land	Deceased Case (N)	Average Per Household
Marginal (0-2.5 acres)	19	9.2
Small (2.5-5 acres)	10	27.6
Semi-medium(5-10 acres)	21	35.1
Medium (10-20 acres)	12	45.7
Large (20+ acres)	03	75.3

The annual income position of each of the category of farmers is given in table 3. under the title 'Annual Income of the Victims Families'. Of the five categories of farmers the large-scale farmer has an annual income of Rs 75,300/-. The medium-scale farmer has an annual income Rs 45, 700/-. The semi-scale farmer who is owning 5-10 acres of land has an annual income of Rs 35,100/-. The small farmers have an annual income of Rs 27, 600/-. A marginal farmer who has owning the maximum land of 2.5 acres has an annual income of 9,200/-. The low annual income has caused more distress has the resultant factors for farmers distress. They are unable to meet out the family demands and social commitments. This cases frustration in the concerned specially farming community. Efforts should be made by all those concerned specially the policy makers to increase the annual income small- scale holders.

Conclusion

An in-depth analysis of the socio-economic surroundings of the victim family is apprehensive, above fusion brings out a few crucial factors as for as social background is concerned. The study revealed that the farmers in the age group 47-58 are more vulnerable to suicides comparing to the suicides among other age groups of farmers. Education is an important tool for moulding the personality of an individual. The study revealed that majority of the farm victims are illiterates. The low annual income has caused more distress has the resultant factors for farmers distress. They are unable to meet out the family demands and social commitments. More number of cases failures to meet the financial commitment of the family has the main cause for farm suicides.

Suggestion

On the basis of the findings and conclusions given above, the following suggestions may be as appropriate measures for policy making to mitigate the distress among the farmers both at aggregate and disaggregate.

- State Government should prevail upon the Government of India for announcement of MSP (Minimum Support Price) well before the commencement of each cropping season.
- Initiate involvement of civil society to discuss and bring about changes in the society by curtailing huge expenses on marriages and other social functions.
- The farmers should be properly educated about the methods of using manure, fertilizers, pesticides and suitable crop pattern through the proper media.

- The farmers should be motivated to grow the crops which suit with agro-climatic conditions and they should be properly educated and encouraged in organic farming.
 - Non Governmental organisations should come forward to involve in activities of SHGs (Self Help Group) to regulate the private money lenders.
- Let us all make efforts to develop confidence among farmers and try to bring smile on their face.

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